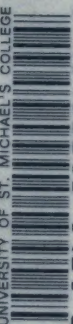


UNIVERSITY OF ST. MICHAEL'S COLLEGE



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# HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS XI

A PEN PORTRAIT BY HIS EMINENCE  
CARDINAL GASQUET ❖ ❖ ❖ AND  
THE POPE AS ALPINE CLIMBER  
TRANSLATED FROM AN ARTICLE  
WRITTEN BY HIMSELF WITH A  
PORTRAIT AND 28 ILLUSTRATIONS

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# HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS XI



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His Holiness Pope Pius XI



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OCT 26 1961









The Pope as Archbishop of Milan



# HIS HOLINESS POPE PIUS XI.

A PEN PORTRAIT BY HIS EMINENCE CARDINAL GASQUET

**T**HE election of Cardinal Achille Ratti to succeed Pope Benedict XV. has been welcomed by all the world. Probably few of the preceding two hundred and sixty-one Supreme Rulers of the Roman Catholic Church, now numbering some 300,000,000 souls, have been better known beyond the limits of their own subjects in the ranks of scholars than was Mgr. Ratti for his far-reaching culture and erudition. If to this reputation there be added the extraordinary charm of his personality, we can understand the chorus of approbation which has greeted his election by the College of Cardinals. Many letters of enthusiastic welcome have been received from scholars in London, Oxford, Cambridge and Manchester—to name only these, where he is known personally and appreciated.

Achille Ratti was born on May 30th, 1857, in the small Lombard town of Desio, in the great Metropolitan diocese of Milan, over which he was subsequently to become Archbishop. His family belonged to the middle class, his father being the manager of the silk business belonging to the Contadi Pusiano. Achille was one of six brothers, only one surviving, with a sister, to welcome his brother on his elevation to the Papal throne. He received his first education in his thoroughly Christian family circle, and was as a small child committed to the care of a worthy priest, Giuseppe Volonteri, who kept a school for boys at Desio. He quickly showed his aptitude for studies, and was much influenced by his uncle, Don Damiano Ratti, an exemplary priest and a zealous pastor of souls, in whose house at Asso he used to spend his summer holidays. Here he became known to the then Archbishop, Monsignore Luigi di Calabiana, who soon recognised and appreciated the youth's love of study, his solid piety, and the gravity of his words and actions.

Desiring to embrace the ecclesiastical state, he first went to the local Seminary; and, after taking his degree in Letters, entered the Theological Seminary at Milan. In all these places he distinguished himself by his great ability and by his more than ordinary application. He was in consequence sent by the Archbishop to the Collegio Lombardo, in Rome, to follow the course



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of studies in the Gregorian University ; and there he took degrees in Philosophy, Theology, and Canon Law. He was ordained priest in 1879 ; and, following his brilliant success in the Roman University, he returned to Milan in 1882, and, after a brief experience of pastoral life, was recalled to the Theological Seminary as Professor first of Theology, and Sacred Eloquence. Here he spent five years ; and then, in 1888, he was appointed a Doctor of the Celebrated Ambrosian Library at Milan. Here he remained for twenty-three years, and was the devoted assistant to that wonderful man, Dr. Ceriani, then the head of the library. Ceriani was perhaps at that time the most famous of Oriental scholars in Europe ; and to him learned men from all parts of the world came for advice and instruction. The present writer had known him well during his stay of some months in England in the 'fifties of the last century, when he was an honoured guest of the house of his family in London. During the last of several visits paid to Mgr. Ceriani in Milan, the writer was introduced by the famous scholar to Dr. Achille Ratti, as one who would be his worthy successor at the Ambrosian Library. This he became in 1907, when Dr. Ceriani died at a ripe old age, and Dr. Ratti was unanimously chosen to succeed him. It would be impossible to speak in detail of the contributions to Italian literature and history which proceeded from the pen of Mgr. Ratti during this period. He became known and honoured for the courteous and ever ready welcome he gave to all students who consulted the famous Library, and for the way in which he placed at their disposal his knowledge and advice. He was served with enthusiastic devotion by his helpers in the Library. His charming personality drew the hearts of all students to him ; and there must be at present many who will call to their memory the happy relations they had with him. Dr. Ratti was an organiser as well as a student, and he introduced great and necessary improvements in the Library.

In 1910 Pope Pius X. called Mgr. Ratti to Rome, first to assist the Prefect of the Vatican Library, Father Ehrle, and on the latter's retirement, in the spring of 1914, he succeeded him. Here he remained to the end of May, 1918, when, to the great grief of all in the Library, he was appointed to other work.



The Pope's Mother, Signora Ratti



The Pope's Father, Francesco Ratti



As a young Priest





Desio, his native town



The House in which the Pope was born

## A Pen Portrait

During the few years he had been in the Vatican Library he had done much to organise the work ; and, as at Milan, so in Rome, he won the affectionate regard of all under him.

To return to Dr. Ratti's work in Milan : above all things, the learned Doctor of the Ambrosian Library was a priest of God. In the midst of all his professional labours as a scholar, he was a zealous priest. During the first years after his ordination, when he was teaching at the Seminary, the nuns of the Order of the Cenacle opened a convent in Milan. The Archbishop appointed the young Theological Professor their first chaplain ; and as long as he remained in the city he devoted himself with untiring energy to the work which grew up in connection with the new foundation. He was the chief co-operator in all the good works which the Sisters undertook for the social care of young girls and women. He personally directed them, and gave them the sound practical but simple religious instructions they needed. Besides this, the learned Prefect of the Ambrosian Library found time personally to teach catechism to little boys at the Church of the S. Sepolcro even on Sunday afternoons and Feast days, and to prepare them for their First Communion.

Besides being a profound student and scholar, as well as a devoted priest, Mgr. Ratti was also a man of action in a different field. It is of interest to many English readers to know that the new Pope has been all his life a professional Alpine climber, the conqueror of peaks and passes. The first Italian ascent of Monte Rosa to reach the summit of Dufour was made by two Milanese priests in 1889. One was Achille Ratti, and the other was his friend, from childhood, a Professor from the College of St. Charles, who died a few years ago as its Rector. These were companions in many an arduous Alpine climb. They both possessed the same spirit, and regarded their excursions as something more than an exercise of muscular strength. They looked on them as a proof of the superiority of man over nature, and as a means of gaining and getting a fuller knowledge of the wonders of God's creation. The ascent of Monte Rosa had indeed many dramatic moments which called forth the imperturbable *sangfroid* and the indomitable persistence of the climbers. They reached the summit only



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after two days and after having been obliged to pass the night with their two guides on a rock amidst the eternal snows. Setting out on their return, they crossed the hill on Zumstein which had never been before attempted ; and, delayed by unforeseen circumstances, only reached their destination on the Italian side after passing yet another night in the open. Meantime the rumour of a catastrophe had been sent by wire, as it was deemed impossible that anyone could have been able to spend two nights on the mountains without shelter ; and the appearance of the party on the third day caused wonder and excitement. Mgr. Ratti has written in the *Collazione Club Alpino Italiano* a vivid account of their adventure. The peak, he says, was conquered, but only at 8 p.m., when, "driven by the wind, which at this height was insupportable, and obliged by the darkness to seek shelter, we descended until, at some thirty metres, we found a ledge of rock almost swept clean of snow." The aneroid marked 4,000 metres (about 15,180 feet), and here they were forced to remain till daybreak, unable to do more, for fear of being precipitated into the abyss below. They were just able to stamp their feet to prevent their being frozen. The coffee, wine and eggs they had with them had been frozen solid ; they had only a few drops of Kirschwasser between them ; and their situation prevented them from taking any sleep. Dr. Ratti's thrilling description of this night passed among the stupendous peaks of Monte Rosa, with the silence broken only by the thunder of a great avalanche on the glaciers below them, is worth reading for the sake of its poetical language and as a testimony of his calm review of the critical situation. Two days after reaching Riffelberg from this expedition Mgr. Ratti and his friend made the ascent of the Matterhorn, which he negotiated without staying at the hut ; but, being once more overtaken by the darkness, he was compelled to spend the night in the open. The following year he ascended Mont Blanc by the Rochar and descended by the Dome Glacier, a feat which at that time had not been otherwise attempted. On one of these climbs, Mgr. Ratti saved the life of a guide who had fallen into a crevice and hung suspended by the rope which bound the climbers to one another. Mgr. Ratti, calm and undismayed, supported



A Bird's-eye View of St. Peter's, Rome





Photograph taken shortly after his Consecration

## A Pen Portrait

him, and by his strength, little by little drew him up to the firm ground on the glacier.

When, in 1914, Mgr. Ratti became Prefect of the Vatican Library, he brought to the task all his previous preparation under his great and venerated master, Ceriani, and his subsequent training in the management of the great Library at Milan. During the turmoil of the War, the new Prefect was able to stand aloof from all party politics and parties, and proved himself the humble follower of the impartial attitude of the Vatican. When the Armistice put an end to the strife of nations, he threw himself into the work of reconstituting the scientific international character of the relations of the Vatican Library with students of all countries.

Under the direction of Mgr. Ratti, the Library and the other collections joined to it, such as the Christian and the Profane Museums, the coins and medals and the work of restoration of manuscripts, continued to expand and grow in importance and utility. The system had been begun under Father Erhle, and Mgr. Ratti was well prepared to supervise its progress. Even when a simple doctor of the Ambrosian Library, he had on more than one occasion come to Rome to study the Vatican method of repairing decaying codices, and had spent much time with the workmen engaged on this delicate business, so as to know in practice as well as in theory the methods to be employed to secure the best results. During the years of his rule at the Library the catalogue of the manuscripts was one of his special cares ; and he began to plan a single catalogue of the printed books which had made great progress. A catalogue of the *Codices Vaticani* (9,852-10,300) was published ; and a third volume of the *Codices Urbinate*, and another volume of the *Vaticani* (10,301-10,700), saw the light in 1920-1. Several volumes of the Vatican publication *Studi e testi* were issued in spite of printing difficulties arising out of the war ; he endeavoured to secure the Chigi Library which was for sale, but the price demanded was beyond the means of the Holy See.

The Vatican Library, besides being a great centre of study and research to which the learned men of the world congregate, has connected with it and under its administration collections of



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great archæological value, visited by great numbers of travellers. The immense halls in which these are housed, though decorated in the barocco style, represent in the paintings and frescoes on their walls the story of Rome in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the rooms are exposed miniatures, illuminations and autographs of almost priceless value. The two museums of Christian and Profane art contain unique collections. Among the classical are the mural frescoes removed from Ostia and elsewhere, including the classical "Nozze Aldobrandine." All these treasures were under the charge of Mgr. Ratti, who, in one of the rooms, collected together the volumes of addresses presented at various times to the Popes Pius IX., Leo XIII., and Pius X. He placed them in show cases, so that the beautiful bindings which enclosed the signatures of millions of faithful children of the Church from all parts of the globe might be seen by all.

In addition to his administrative work at the Vatican, Mgr. Ratti found time to continue his own literary and critical work ; and he contributed two papers to the *Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia*. In this way he knew how to unite the work of a wise governor and a man of science ; and in both he was loved and appreciated by his colleagues and by all his staff. He was consulted by students from all parts of the world, who were ever grateful for his courteous kindness and the help he was ready to give to all who sought it.

On April 25th, 1918, Mgr. Ratti was taken from his studies and his beloved Vatican Library, to the regret of everyone who knew him, and sent to Poland to inquire into the ecclesiastical state of that country and to try to bring some kind of order into the chaos resulting from the world war, and from the change of Government in consequence of the constitution of the country as a national entity. The appointment caused great surprise, but subsequent events proved the wisdom of the choice. The task entrusted to him was very difficult ; but he possessed many qualities of mind and body which ensured success. Poland, after the Peace of Brest-Litowski, was still occupied by German troops under the Bavarian General Von Beseler ; and a Council of Regency was constituted composed of the Archbishop of Warsaw,

## A Pen Portrait

Von Kakowski (now Cardinal), Prince Lubonirski and the Baron Ostrowski, but the people regarded it with suspicion and believed it to be merely an instrument of German domination. The position was critical, and called for great tact and diplomatic skill. Mgr. Ratti at once made it known that his mission was purely ecclesiastical and had nothing to do with politics, and he scrupulously confined himself to this mission. His prudence and upright dealing soon won all who came in touch with him, and materially assisted in the settlement of the country and the restoration of confidence in the Government.

The good results of this mission, so quickly obtained, caused the Holy See to enlarge his mission and to extend his jurisdiction as Visitor to Russia. This forced Mgr. Ratti to undertake a prolonged journey, during which he was everywhere received with enthusiasm as the Pope's representative. His first care was to provide for the ecclesiastical needs of the vast district, which had been almost totally ruined by the break-up of the Russian autocratic rule and by the chaos brought about by the Great War. Through his good offices many prisoners and hostages, including the Archbishop of Mohilew and the Bishop of Minsk, were released by Bolsheviks. In Poland, it was mainly through his influence that two articles in the new Polish Constitution were introduced, the one declaring that the Catholic religion occupies the first position in the State, and the second that no measures concerning the Catholic religion should be taken without preliminary consultation and agreement with the Holy See.

In recognition of the work already done by Mgr. Ratti, the Pope in July, 1919, nominated him as Nuncio to Poland, and he was consecrated by Archbishop Kakowski at Warsaw on the 28th of the October of that year. But the circumstance which, perhaps beyond others, brought out clearly all the exceptional qualities of the man, his calmness and firmness, and we may almost say his heroism, was the Bolshevik invasion of Poland in July, 1920. The Polish people were in a state of panic, and the Government itself was in despair. Those who had not been able to fly before the invaders prepared for all the expected horrors of a Bolshevik conquest. All the Foreign Ministers abandoned the



## His Holiness Pope Pius XI.

capital when the advancing enemy were at its gates. Mgr. Ratti alone remained at his post, and never for a moment lost his calm determination and self-possession. His attitude was a source of strength to those who were forced to remain, and will never be forgotten by the people. His confidence in God's protection was justified by the unexpected failure of the attack and by the almost miraculous saving of the city from the Bolshevik hosts.

In the Consistory of the 13th of June, 1921, Pope Benedict XV. created Archbishop Ratti Cardinal and Archbishop of Milan. Two days later when giving him the red biretta the Pope spoke of him as follows :—" If we turn to the second of these *Porporati* we hear a thousand voices of praise uplifted from the ranks of scholars and of students of diplomacy. Oh ! What wonderful harmony of these two from which the words ' Diplomatic Studies ' are taken. See, the students of the Diplomatic Schools rejoice for the former Prefect of the Ambrosian Library of Milan and of the Vatican in Rome because of the zeal with which he was always aided in research and in the making known the treasures buried in ancient charters and documents. See, the students, and with them the masters of Diplomacy, offer praise to the apostolic Nuncio of Poland, who with earnest firmness, with exquisite tact, with imperturbable sincerity, has succeeded in bringing about concord between the State and the Church in times of great difficulty and amid perilous circumstances. The sacred purple once again manifests itself as the highest honour bestowed as the reward of previous merits. We salute the new Cardinal as one who will by his new honour give help to the Pope in the government of the Church."

To Englishmen it will be of interest to know that the present Pontiff has more than once visited our country, knows our language, and can speak it slightly. He has worked among the manuscripts at the British Museum, at Oxford, and elsewhere. The last time he came to England was for the Roger Bacon celebration at the University of Oxford in 1914. At the luncheon in Merton College, Mgr. Ratti spoke in Latin, and his theme was completely to dispose of the idea prevalent that Friar Bacon's studies had been stopped, and he himself had been imprisoned



The crowd watching the smoke for news of the Election





Altars prepared in the Vatican for the Cardinals' Mass

[Photo, *Felici*



At the Balcony of St. Peter's





Coronation Scene in St. Peter's, Rome

## A Pen Portrait

by orders from Rome as a dangerous man. In fact, he quoted the order of the Pope given to the Franciscan General that Bacon was to be allowed paper and pen and ink, and to write as he wished.

And now this versatile scholar, the deeply learned man, sits upon the throne of St. Peter, and is called to direct the millions of people in communion with the Roman Church. He has a great task, without doubt, but he brings to it eminent qualities of head and heart. He is a man of great physical strength, and one who has the courage of his opinions. He is one who thinks before he acts ; and, above all, perhaps, he is a man with a great heart, who draws all who meet him to himself. Besides, he is always self-possessed. One small instance may suffice : On the very day of his election as Pope, within a few minutes of his giving his blessing to the world from the loggia of St. Peter's, passing through the *Sala Ducale* on the way to his room he saw the English Secretary of one of the Cardinals, and this Secretary had just lost his mother. At that absorbing moment he took the hand of the priest and, expressing sorrow at his loss, promised to remember his mother in his prayers.

## THE POPE AS ALPINE CLIMBER\*

MONTE ROSA (DUFOUR SPITZE) FROM MACUGNAGA,  
AND THE FIRST CROSSING OF THE ZUMSTEIN SATTEL

EARLY in June, 1889, after making arrangements with my incomparable friend and companion of Alpine expeditions, the Rev. Luigi Grasselli, I wrote to my guide, Gadin of Courmayeur, asking him to be at Macugnaga on July 28th, where we would join him on the following day. It was our intention to go by the Weissthor and the Cima di Jazzi, and so descend on Zermatt. We had also decided to give up this route if necessary for the ascent of the Dufour Spitze (the highest peak of Monte Rosa) from Macugnaga. To avoid discussion we had kept our intention to ourselves, feeling sure that if the proposal were made on the spot and in favourable conditions, it would be welcomed. Gadin's reply, however, showed

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\* Translated from an article by Dr. A. Ratti (Bollettino del C.A.I. Vol. XXIII. 1889).



## His Holiness Pope Pius XI.

our caution to be unnecessary. "I agree," he wrote, "to be at Macugnaga on the 28th; I advise you that, if the weather is fine, we shall do Monte Rosa." Gadin had agreed to bring another guide, Alessio Proment, a vigorous and intelligent youth, to serve as porter. We knew that neither of these men had made the ascent of the Dufour Spitze by any route, nor had we ourselves, and we knew it would not be an easy expedition. Three years earlier, the sight of the memorial stone to Marinelli and Imsegg in the cemetery of Macugnaga and the particulars I had heard of the catastrophe to which they fell victims had left a melancholy impression on my mind. I had studied the published accounts of previous ascents of the Dufour Spitze from Macugnaga; but it seemed to me that the dangers and disaster encountered in those previous ascents might reasonably be attributed to unfavourable mountain and atmospheric conditions. With regard to us, the important point was that we knew our men. It was just a year since we had attempted the ascent of Mont Blanc from Courmayeur with them. My brother Edward was one of our party at the time, he also belonging to the Milan section of the Alpine Club. Imprisoned by wind and snow in the Sella Hut, we were forced by lack of provisions and fuel to descend in spite of the storm, and it was in this descent that our men had inspired us with complete confidence in them. This trust will not seem exaggerated to those who know the locality and will imagine it covered with deep snow far below the terrace on which stood the old hut, now abandoned.

In 1867 Mathews and Morshead had formed a plan for scaling the colossus of Monte Rosa from the Pizzo Bianco side. They thought, however, it would be too risky because of the constant fall of avalanches from the highest peak. The idea was taken up by Mr. Taylor and by the Pendlebury brothers, who were the first to carry it through on July 22nd, 1872. It is evident from their account in the *Alpine Journal* that the widening of the crevasses of the upper glacier and the constant threat of avalanches caused serious trouble and even some moments of real panic to the English climbers. The same ascent was made in 1880 by Herr Lendenfeld of Graz.

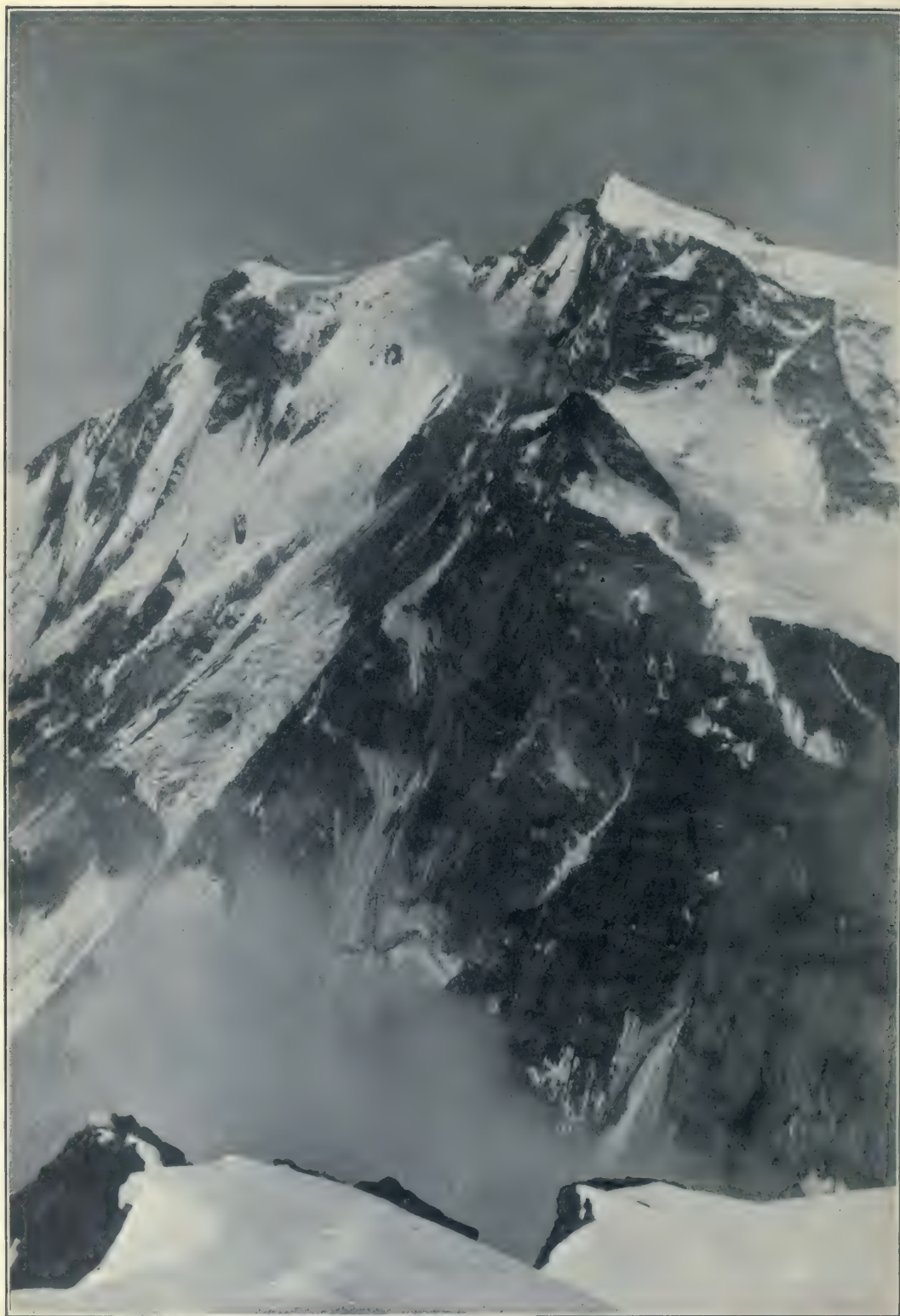




MONTE ROSA: EAST FACE  
Marinelli Hut

[From a photograph by Signor Carnaghi]





MONTE ROSA  
View from the Cima di Jazzi

[Photo by Alfred Holmes]

## As Alpine Climber

It occurred to Damiano Marinelli of the Florence Section that it was not proper that foreigners only should attempt the ascent of the Italian side of Monte Rosa, which is as essentially Italian as the Matterhorn is essentially Swiss. He was at Macugnaga in the summer of 1881, but conditions could not have been more unfavourable. The sirocco was blowing, and there were constant avalanches. On August 8th he fell a victim to an avalanche, in the great *couloir* which bears his name. Another foreigner, Prof. Schulz of Leipzig, attempted the same ascent and, favoured by exceptionally good conditions, was successful.

These and later expeditions previous to ours showed that what we specially needed was ice and fine cold weather, the first to secure us against crevasses, the second against avalanches. We could consider ourselves lucky if we found little frost, snow or ice on the rocks of the summit.

As it turned out, we had the good fortune to carry out the expedition under the best possible conditions.

Two days before our arrival at Macugnaga a heavy fall of snow had occurred on the side of the Pizzo Bianco. The temperature was distinctly lowered, and if any stone or cornice had had an unstable equilibrium it would certainly have already fallen. It remained to be seen how much fresh snow had fallen. To the storm had succeeded not only fine, but splendid weather, and when on the road from Vanzone to Prequarero, Monte Rosa burst upon our view, it was a vision of incomparable beauty. Around us the fresh green of forests and meadows ; above us, heaven's pavilion decked in the fairest azure that may be seen, of crystalline purity and transparency ; facing us, with its immense expanse of snow and ice, with its gigantic, ten-peaked crown, about 15,000 feet high, aglow and aflame with the first rays of the sun, the Alpine colossus towered in invitation—or was it in defiance?

We arrived at Pestarena as a group of goldminers, lamp in hand, were about to go down again to the galleries, after their early meal. It is well known that the practical sense and characteristic courage of the English finds a way of employing advantageously no small capital in this far corner of Italy. And I say no small capital, not only for the importance of the work and the



## His Holiness Pope Pius XI.

number of men employed, but also (be it said with praise) for the generosity with which our workmen's security is provided for at Pestarena where they are not, as in so many other places, victims of a homicidal economy.

Thanks to the courtesy of the English Consulate at Milan and the kindness of the overseer at the mine, we were able to watch the chief work at the mine and see how the king of metals is separated from the crushed earth.

It was half-past eight in the morning, and Pestarena was not far behind us, when our men came into view. They had not expected us so early, but the greeting was none the less cordial. "Well, sirs, Monte Rosa is there, and we shall do it," said Gadin at once. The good man had made up his mind, and had already done something to ensure the success of the expedition. Arriving a day ahead of us, he had not wasted his time, but had employed it in collecting information and studying the ground on the spot, going with Proment as far as the Pedriolo Alp. With the intuitive, almost divining, instinct of a proved and expert guide, he had already mapped out the route to take from the Marinelli Hut to the Dufour Spitze. For anything that eye or glass could see, there was not a crevasse, not a hanging or threatening cornice, not one disturbing evidence of fresh snow or visible trace of ice on the highest peak. It was hardly possible to distinguish the *bergschrund*. Arriving at the Monte Moro Inn, we found that our project had received a most encouraging vote of confidence. The proprietor, Sig. G. Oberto, had been on the Dufour Spitze with the first English expedition of Mr. Taylor, and knew our men. "With such weather and such men," he said to me, "you will get on all right."

I have gone into these details at length to make it clear that the idea of a desperate adventure had never crossed our minds. In truth it seems to me that if we were on the whole fortunate we were not foolhardy nor, properly speaking, rash. I do not say this for the benefit of experienced climbers, but rather, if I may be pardoned for the expression, for the profane. I would wish to assure the latter that mountaineering proper is not necessarily rashness, but is entirely a question of prudence and of a little courage, of strength and steadiness, of a feeling for nature

## As Alpine Climber

and her most hidden beauties, which are often awe-inspiring, and for that reason the more sublime and the more suggestive to a contemplative spirit.

We stopped at Macugnaga long enough to refresh ourselves and to pay a brief visit to the solitary and charming little church, and a briefer one to its pastor, whose cordial hospitality we are surely not the first to record. Let this simple mention thank him also for the almost fraternal anxiety with which, armed with his field-glasses, he followed with his eyes a good part of our long ascent.

A little before noon we began the climb to the Marinelli Hut, where, after being greeted on the way by a herd of chamois, we arrived about seven in the evening, without any other discomfort than that of a mortal drowsiness, which assailed the writer in the course of the climb, and against which, if the excellent reasons of Gadin had no effect, a few drops of ammonia had. I was not surprised by this phenomenon, which is not unusual while climbing. The sufficient reason was the sudden rise from the plain of Milan to this height of almost 10,000 feet. But, from personal experience, I had full belief in the final effect of climbing on my organism, and I can say such faith was largely realised. At the hut the first *contretemps*, inconvenient but not serious, befell us. We found it only half closed and full of snow. It may be imagined how we felt, longing as we were for a little warmth. But thanks to a wise division of labour, we were able to put the intruder out, and make ourselves masters of the place. Melted snow and Liebig's Extract of Beef furnished not the only, but the useful part of our supper, while one or other of us kept going out to consult the weather or to enjoy the glorious view which the evening presented from this height. There was solemn silence, an unending vivid sparkling of stars above the deep blue velvet of the sky, the enormous masses of the vast summits towering against it with their gigantic shadows on the white expanse of snow and ice.

A little before 11 we stretched ourselves on the bare boards that were our bed and went to sleep. Our slumber was more brief than we could have wished, for Gadin, as agreed, waked us about one o'clock, and in a few minutes our little company was on foot. Not one avalanche had disturbed our short repose, and



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the cold and fine weather still continued ; then, forward. To save ourselves from the possibility, I will not say risk, of avalanches, we had decided to cross the Marinelli *couloir* by night, so that even in case of a difficult crossing we should have made it before the sun rose to disturb the snow and ice which lie above.

After refreshing ourselves with a little Liebig and warm wine, and carefully extinguishing the fire and closing the hut door firmly, we took to the rope. Gadin tied himself first with great care, then I, and after me Proment, and last Prof. Grasselli, and in this order we continued during the climb. Proment carried one lamp and Gadin another until we reached the rocks. A short climb above the hut found us on the edge of the famous *couloir*. We had planned to cross it diagonally, always tending upwards, nor did it seem as though it would be difficult to gain the rocks of the Imsengrücken which loomed up before us. Gadin handed me the lamp, and after him we all struck out on the snow. Bad luck ! Under a thin crust we sank in up to our knees. It seemed to Gadin after careful examination that this was a purely local accumulation due to a recent small avalanche, and this turned out to be the case. We had to go down further to seek better going, and our diagonal crossing was thus enormously lengthened. When we got down we found the snow not only solid but extremely hard. This was another misfortune, especially for Gadin, who had not expected to begin cutting steps so early. Poor Gadin ! When I think what hard labour he endured for almost the whole of that day, without ever wishing to let another take his place, I still feel amazed at his steadiness and at his muscles of steel.

Another unwelcome discovery soon followed. The great *couloir* was composed of an endless number of smaller ones which enormously multiplied its surface and our difficulties. I find no mention of this detail in any account of previous ascents, and perhaps the absence of this circumstance and of similar ones I noted explains how others crossed the *couloir* in much less time than we did. We were continually obliged to go up in order to go down, and to go down in order to go up, gaining very little ground on the whole breadth of the *couloir*, the lamps almost always hidden behind the ridges dividing the different *couloirs*.



Monte Rosa : Dufour Spitze from Lysjoch

[Photo by G. K. Williamson]







ROSA  
of the Herbetet

[Telephoto by V. Sella





Monte Rosa : Dufour Spitze and Nordend from top of Punta Gnifetti [Photo by G. K. Williamson]

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Very often we heard Gadin's tranquil voice : " Prenez garde, messieurs, c'est un mauvais pas." Gadin, who spoke his Italian well and held his own even in English, in difficult moments seemed to prefer a kind of French of his own, like many in the Aosta Valley. Meanwhile our eyes were instinctively raised and lowered along the steep *couloir*, to fix themselves hungrily at last on the rocks of the Imsengrücken. After a good hour and a half of hard going we still seemed to be in the middle of the *couloir* and at an insuperable distance from the rocks, like the shipwrecked sailor so fitly described in Dante's well-known verses.

A rest of fifteen minutes and something to drink, whether coffee or wine I cannot say, and then we began to climb as straight up as we could on the rocks which end in forming a narrow ridge between the *couloir* and the upper glacier. It wouldn't have mattered so much if the rocky ridge had been continuous. A ridge of good rock as this was, however steep it may be, always presents firm and relatively easy footholds. The trouble was that at a few yards from the edge of the glacier the ridge abruptly ended in a gulley whose sides were as steep as they were smooth. This might perhaps have proved an insurmountable difficulty if it had not been for a little ridge of snow which rose gently and easily from the base of the precipice and joined the rock to the glacier. It was not the best of crossings, but there was no other, and the snow wall, though thin, was almost as firm and solid as ice. Its length was equal to that of the rope between two of us, which is the limit of safety. " Tenez-moi la corde, monsieur," said Gadin, making up his mind after a short consultation. And while I and the others, planted firmly on rock, followed him with our eyes, our hands on the rope ready to help, he crossed up with enviable self-possession and in perfect safety, and took up his position on the glacier. What was difficult enough for the leader was not so bad for the others, and we all went ahead without other incident than the writer being ordered to halt for a minute or two in the middle of the acrobatic crossing by Gadin, who wished to find firmer footing on the glacier. The moment must have appeared most serious in the judgment of our gallant guide, as (finding the unwelcome halt was prolonged) I asked him if I might go ahead.



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"Monsieur," he replied, without turning, "je vous en prie, ne parlez pas ; cela me dérange l'esprit."

When we had all crossed, we began to advance on the glacier, for some time steering to the left and climbing between the Zumstein Spitze and the Dufour Spitze, then to the right towards the rocks of the final peak. . . . The ice was in as perfect condition as one could desire, firm and continuous, but was, unfortunately, covered by a layer of snow, which was not old or hard enough to bear us, and required the cutting of steps in the actual ice, which added much to our fatigue. Partly for this reason and partly because of the steepness of the ice walls our progress was slow, but we kept steadily ascending, though in long zig-zags. After several hours of silent and weary work, we stopped at a short distance from the *bergschrand* in the shadow of a massive wall of the pure ice, which jutted out over us like a crystal pavilion. Numerous icicles hung from its extreme edge like a fringe of enormous diamonds. For the first time since we had left the hut we looked at our watches and found it was about one o'clock. We had been going for the greater part of twelve hours with practically no stop except at the Imsengrücken. We had won the right to a little rest, so we sat down on the snow to contemplate the sublimity of nature, refreshing ourselves with Suchard chocolate, which was then and later a real providence for us : not that we lacked other graces from God, but our stomachs did not seem disposed to require them. The Dufour rocks seemed very near, but this was an optical illusion. I have no record of having looked at the aneroid we had with us, due probably to the clearness of the air. Everything is on a great scale at that height, the mountains grouped round, the distances that separate them, the general lines of the landscape and its details. But for this very reason the grandeur of the details is lost in the general harmony. This may be noted in the great works of human art. The climber who has seen St. Peter's and the Bernini portico, so colossal and so gracefully harmonious, so easy to gather up in the magnificent simplicity of a glance in spite of the variety of detail, knows that even in this particular it is in the imitation of nature that our art is most strictly related to that of God, first artificer of every lovely

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thing. But who of us had a head for such matters? What was certain was that in a couple of hours we should reach the summit, and the same evening (what matter at what hour) we should sleep on our laurels, or in other words, on the soft beds of the Riffel, with its comforts made doubly precious.

Again the snow, which in the Marinelli *couloir* and on the glacier had so effectually hindered our progress, was about to serve us badly and in an even worse degree. We set out with renewed vigour, taking a route which, while not the shortest, had not the disadvantage of being dominated by masses of ice which at that hour feel the full effects of the sun and discharge their avalanches. We were obliged to scale an ice wall which rose perpendicularly on our left. It took a good half-hour to overcome a height of several yards, using every assistance from hands and feet. This passage overcome, only a snowy slope, not too steep, separated us from the rocks. We started out on it, when to our amazement the rocks seemed to get further away as we went towards them, and the last peak rose higher and steeper than before. Illusion gave way to reality, and the reality was that a long distance remained to climb before reaching the summit. Then the snow became increasingly soft and yielding, so that very soon we were no longer walking, but most painfully rolling along. Gadin confided to me later that at this point he almost gave up hope of reaching the summit that day, and he had looked out for shelter for the night on the first rocks, though, as turned out best, he said nothing at the time. At last we touched *terra firma*—we were on the rocks! The nearness of fear sharpens desire. The sun distinctly setting showed us that we had not a moment to lose. What of rest and what of the night? . . . We attacked the rocks of the ridge rising above the Imsengrücken. It is easier to imagine than to tell how we struggled on the bare slate and masses of reddish gneiss that form the summit. At one point I heard my companion cry out, and turning, I saw his ice-axe fly like an arrow down the rocks to the nearest snow field. What was to be done? We could not even attempt to find it, and all that evening and the following morning Prof. Grasselli had to have his hands on ice and in snow, and got them so frost-bitten that they did not



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recover for months. The almost conquered giant was taking his revenge. A little later the wind blew so hard that the Professor's hat was blown off (evidently Monte Rosa had an unenviable predilection for him), followed almost immediately by mine and Proment's. Gadin's was reserved for the ire of the Matterhorn. But our efforts were finally rewarded, and it must have been at half-past seven that we found ourselves on the Ostspitze, the highest summit of Monte Rosa. I shall not waste a word in describing what we saw and felt in that unforgettable moment. To the experienced the memory of such moments speaks with its own incomparable eloquence. To others no words would suffice or appear credible.

We had every reason to believe our expedition practically accomplished. We reserved for the following morning the Allerhöchste Spitze. (Here follows a discussion of the various summits of Monte Rosa, quoting especially Longman in the Alpine Journal.)

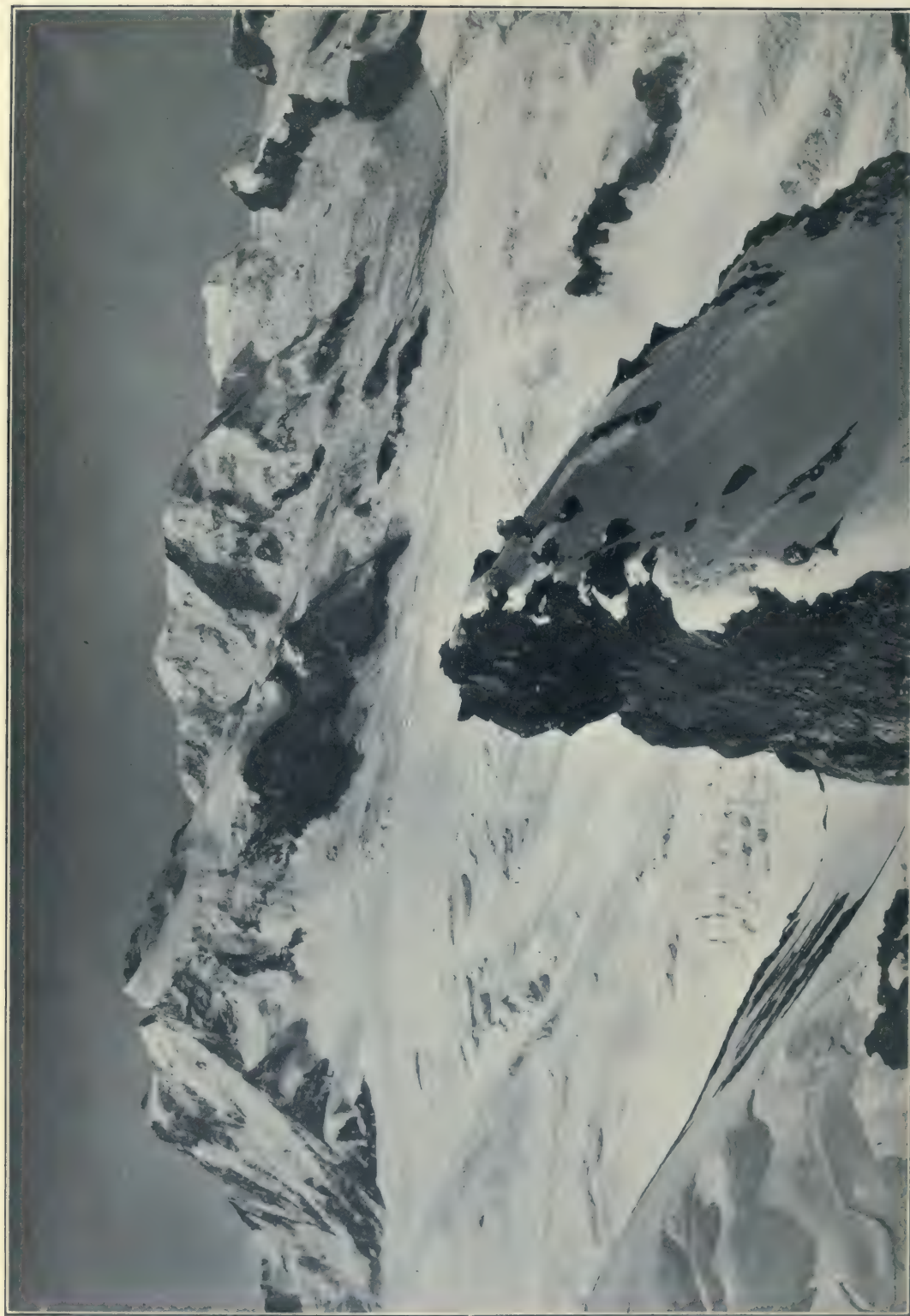
We return to our story. We were on the Ostspitze, but we could not remain long. Pursued by the wind, which was unbearable at the height and by the advance of night, we soon descended to a ledge of rock some hundred feet below the summit, bare of snow, and there settled ourselves as well as we could. It was half-past eight, and the aneroid showed 15,300 feet above sea level. The spot we were on was not a comfortable one for those who had passed such a day as ours, and could certainly not compete with the beds and comforts of the Riffel. It was, however, quite safe for anyone who could feel safe about himself, although extremely narrow. It was impossible to take a step in any direction. When we sat down our feet were hanging over space. We were able to exercise them, however, taking care not to lose our balance. And there was great need of these elementary gymnastics. The cold was intense. Without being able exactly to determine the degree, I remember that our coffee and wine were completely frozen, and our eggs not only undrinkable but uneatable. We had recourse to the chocolate again and to some excellent kirsch. In such conditions of temperature and place it would have been most imprudent to give way to sleep. But who wanted to sleep in that pure air which penetrates every fibre in us, and with such a magnificent scene before us! At that height, in



MONTE ROSA AND LYSKAMM  
View from South Arête of Rimpfischhorn

[Photo by V. Sella]





MONTE ROSA

Lyskamm and lower peak of Rimpfischhorn: View taken from summit of Rimpfischhorn

[Photo by V. Sella

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the midst of that grandest of grand Alpine theatres, in that pure and transparent air, under that dark sapphire sky, lighted by a thread of a moon and as far as the eye could reach all brilliant with stars in that silence—No, I will not try to describe the indescribable. Both Prof. Grasselli and I are firmly persuaded that it will hardly be given us again to see so magnificent a natural spectacle. We felt we were in the presence of a new and marvellous revelation of the omnipotence and majesty of God. How could we complain of the fatigues we had endured, how could we even think of them? Many climbers must have experienced in themselves, as we did then, the profound truth of the line,

“Del mondo consacro Jeova le cime !”

While we were lost in meditation, the great silence was broken by a rumbling like tremendous thunder. It was an avalanche which detached itself beneath us, but at too great distance to disturb us, and began to move. Shaken and deafened, we followed the formidable ruin with our ears, unable to do so with our eyes, as, ever growing, it fell just as Dante said, with

“Un fracasso d’un suon pien di spavento,”

until it was stopped on the lower glacier. When silence returned, it seemed to us even more profound and solemn.

In contemplation and in exchanging a few fleeting words of wonder, we spent that marvellous night which none of us will ever forget. We were permitted also to enjoy from these heights the ever beautiful spectacle of the dawn of a perfect day, the first spreading of daylight, the east decking itself in loveliest colours, and the sun sparkling from peak to peak, its rays extending like a mantle of fire over a thousand summits, and in its descent over the slopes of ice and snow working miracles of splendour and of colour. An artist would have gone mad. For us it was time to move and climb to the ridge.

The evening before we had formed a good idea of the difficulties which we had yet to overcome. For speed and security we left all our small baggage, carrying with us only the ice axes and the rope. It was about 4.45 or 5 o’clock when we abandoned our perch, and, half-frozen as we were, it took us a good half-hour to climb again to the Ostspitze. This is joined to the



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Dufour Spitze by a narrow ridge formed of frozen snow and slabs of gneiss, interrupted here and there by projecting masses. Resting our feet now on the Italian side and now on the Swiss, sometimes literally straddling the ridge, finally cautiously traversing a projection and crossing a narrow and very steep *couloir* descending to the Swiss side we finally found ourselves on the rocky point of the Dufour Spitz. It was 8.20. Here the altitude is only exceeded by that of Mont Blanc, and that by only 560 feet.

The weather remained fine and the air clear, but the cold and the wind also continued. We took a little chocolate instead of the traditional champagne, and we left an account of our entirely Italian ascent in a bottle which we found among the rocks, and then considered our descent. Traces of the last party who had climbed from Zermatt were still visible, and showed us the way generally followed on the Swiss side. We were tempted to take it in order not to have to climb to the ridge again, which would have been difficult. But it seemed better to return to our bivouac and take up our few traps and attempt to find the ice axe, whose loss my companion felt greatly. So we were again on the Ostspitze and at our bivouac, crossed the ridge again, took up our sacks and got down by the rocks to about the height of Zumstein Sattel. Our men failing in the attempt to recover the lost ice axe, we took to the Col itself at a point about midway between the Dufour Spitz and the Zumstein Spitz. We arrived about 1 p.m. Down below was the Grenzgletscher, but a large *crevasse* which separated it from a rock belt ran all around it as far as the eye could see, and beyond these rocks one of the steepest snow slopes I have ever seen. Many climbers have seen that wall at close quarters, and some have traversed it in climbing the Dufour Spitz by the south-west slope. The strong and bitter-cold wind did not permit us to stand long considering. I was curious to see how Gadin would take us out of the difficulty. "Faites comme moi, monsieur," he said, and I saw that, with face turned to the wall, he began to descend backwards, making large holes in the snow with hands and feet, taking particular care to drive in his ice axe as far as possible. And down we went, I do not know in what time, but it seemed a very long time to me. With great

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difficulty, keeping somewhat to the left, where it seemed easiest to approach the glacier, we crossed the belt of rocks. Only the *bergschrund* remained to be crossed, from which we were separated by an overhanging slope of good snow. With time and patience we might have found a spot where the *bergschrund* narrowed, or was crossed by a solid bridge. Gadin proposed a more expeditious and as safe a method. He first, then the rest of us, moving one at a time, each taking the length of the rope while the others stood ready to hold him if necessary, we sat down on the overhanging slope over the *bergschrund*. Sliding at first, then flying over the *bergschrund* itself, we found ourselves plunged in the soft snow which covered to a considerable depth the glacier beneath. Thus in a few minutes we made an amount of progress which might have taken us some good hours. Having reached the glacier, we felt like those who set their feet on a broad high road, after leaving a rough and dangerous path. Continuing our descent, we crossed the rocks of the Dufour Spitze on the Italian side and crossed the col which opens between the Dufour Spitze and the Zumstein Spitze. If this were not so difficult, it would be a natural route between the Monte Rosa glacier on the Italian side and the Grenzletscher on the Swiss side.

What we did may have some importance in the Alpine history of Monte Rosa, for we had made the *first crossing of the Zumstein Sattel*, perhaps the second highest col in the Alps. I believe there can be no doubt as to the priority of our descent by the rocks of the Dufour Spitze. From what I know and have been able to verify in Alpine publications it would appear that this col was not only never previously crossed, but not even reached from the direction of Macugnaga, and had only three times been reached from the Zermatt side, and each time by parties of English climbers.

The Grenzletscher descends for a long distance in great terraces, like a gigantic staircase, peaks flanked by a balustrade of snow, here and there broken by vast black rocks. A real desert of snow. I remember how the lines of Salmini came to my mind :

Neve, neve, sempre neve,  
Fredda, muta, fitta, lieve . . .  
Una bianca vertigine.



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Lower down, the glacier has the aspect and the form of a majestic river with great sweeps in it, flowing into the vast basin of the Gorner, where the ten glaciers descending from the Weissthorn, the Nordend, the Dufour Spitze, the Zwillinge, the Schwarzthorn, the Breithorn, the Klein Matterhorn, and from the Theodule have their imposing meeting. In that immensity of dead nature, we seemed to disappear, to lose ourselves. And the best of it was that if we did not lose ourselves, we lost our way.

We knew well the paths on the Riffel Horn and the Gornergrat that lead to the Riffel Hotel, and Gadin knew them ; but either his memory betrayed him, or in the strangeness of the place his eyes, half blinded by the reflection of the snow, found a path where there was not one. We went on, taking the precautions usual on crossing a glacier, like those who feel themselves nearly home and see no reason for hurrying, stopping at our ease at a spot called Blattje, where we were at last able to satisfy the thirst which for a long time had mercilessly tormented us ; a thirst for which it is well known snow is no remedy. Meanwhile the sun passed the meridian, declined, disappeared and no path appeared. We went from one glacier to another, climbing the moraine to examine more closely the rocks of the Riffel Horn ; but no path. Darkness came on, and at last night closed in. We lighted our one remaining lamp, but that helped little. Anyone who knows what a great moraine is like, the very image of chaos, can form an idea of our way of getting along. In a word, all search was useless. Two steps from the comfortable beds of the Riffel, we had to resign ourselves to pass the night on the hard stones of the moraine. That was a small matter in comparison with what we had gone through the previous night, and after all, we could consider ourselves fortunate. In so many hours, and in such conditions as I have already described, we had met no real peril, no grave accident, no slip of a foot even. If the fortune of the moment was adverse, it was fair and wise to bear it cheerfully. This we did, and having chosen the least inconvenient spot, sheltered from falling stones, as the lamp at last went out we fell peacefully asleep, to the real benefit of our muscles, which were beginning to feel done up.

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I think it would probably be an exaggeration to say that we met with any real risks on our expedition. In regard to the real and serious difficulties we did meet with, I fully believe Gadin when he tells me that he has encountered much more serious ones in other ascents. It appears from the accounts of almost all the expeditions that preceded ours that they did encounter real and serious danger ; and it seems to me that the mountain or the air, or both, must have been in very different conditions from those we experienced.

We were awakened from a deep sleep by Gadin's voice announcing that Proment had found the path a little above where we were, and that we ought to reach it immediately. We did not need to be told twice ; we ascended the glacier and were soon at the Riffelberg. It was high time ; Gadin could no longer use his eyes. At the Riffel we had the benefit of a regular deluge of fresh milk, to the astonishment of those there. The explanation of this was that notice of our ascent had reached Zermatt, together with our luggage from Macugnaga. The manager of the Post Hotel there, not seeing us appear, had telegraphed to the Riffel, asking after us. We were therefore obliged to go down to Zermatt as quickly as possible, leaving Gadin to attend to his eyes and join us at his leisure. I fulfil a grateful duty in thanking, both in the name of Professor Graselli and of Gadin, the hotel staff and the guests, but especially an English gentleman, whose name, I am sorry to say, is unknown to me, for the courteous care which they gave to our guide. He needed and deserved it. It is only right to insert here a word to express in some fashion Professor Graselli's satisfaction and mine for what Gadin did in this ascent, and especially on the 30th of July. I can only repeat the words that a famous climber, Edward Whymper, wrote long ago of M. Croz, one of the bravest of Alpine guides (*Scrambles among the Alps*, E. Whymper) : " Could he have performed the feat upon the boards of a theatre that he did on this occasion, he would have brought down the house with thunders of applause. . ." Proment also gave us entire satisfaction.

I had finished writing this account when certain foreign



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publications were brought to my notice, in which the difficulties and dangers of the ascent of Monte Rosa from the Macugnaga side are especially discussed. The names of well-known English and German climbers figure in the discussion.

We are as glad to read these discussions now as we are that we did not know of them before our ascent. One's judgment of the conditions of atmosphere and place on which the ascent itself must depend can only be calm and objective when the mind is not pre-occupied.

All things considered, in ascents of this kind I admit that it is not easy to acquire previous certitude. I also admit that it is specially difficult as regards the Eastern slope of Monte Rosa. It is entirely the merit of Gadin to have foreseen in our case and clearly divined the actual conditions of the moment. This intuition, which I should call that of the *hic et nunc*, differing from general principles, which only experience can furnish, is one of the most valuable and necessary gifts in a guide. I never saw it developed to so high a degree as in Gadin ; I was therefore not surprised to read of the ascent of Mont Blanc by a new route, which he and the guide Petigax accomplished a few days after ours.

It has been my intention to give an account, if possible exact, certainly conscientious, of a particular and concrete case ; not to establish general rules. Far be it from me to give other or greater importance to our ascent than a relative or affectionate one, such as may be attributed to amateur climbers ; grateful to God for having conceded to me the possibility of admiring close at hand beauties certainly amongst the greatest and most imposing of this visible world which He has created ; glad if we have been able to fill certain perceptible gaps in the chronicles of the Italian Alpine Club. I wish that others may have such a concurrence of favourable circumstances as will procure for them a similar or greater satisfaction, not only with the same safety, but, as I believe to be possible, with less inconvenience and difficulty. Difficulties and inconveniences faced with the caution necessary pass, leaving mind and body refreshed ; and an indelible memory of those great and marvellous spectacles, "which to see exalts me within myself." "Che di vederli in me stesso m'esalto."—Dante, *Inferno*. iv. 120.







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XI : A PEN PORTRAIT /  
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